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RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 0540  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 001144

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TAGS: PINR PREL PGOV PHUM EAID KPAO MR

SUBJECT: LEADING POLITICAL PARTY COALITION FALLS APART

Classified By: CDA Steven Koutsis, Reasons 1.4(b)(d)

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(C) Summary  
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-- On August 31, the Alliance for Justice and Democracy (AJD) announced that it had split from the Bloc For Change (BPC) political party coalition.

-- The BPC was Mauritania's first political party coalition, and the only coalition with a clearly defined platform, namely, supporting the rights of Afro-Mauritanians.

-- AJD president (an Afro-Mauritanian) told PolOff that "Mauritania is not yet ready for an Afro-Mauritanian president," and that he will run instead for a seat in the National Assembly.

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(C) Comments  
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-- BPC's fate illustrates the ongoing struggle of political parties and coalitions as they fight to gain relevance in the unfamiliar territory of a democratic transition.

-- It appears the main goal of the parties is to leverage their position in a coalition to strengthen their own hands. This only leads to mistrust rather than the building of consensus, and such break-ups are inevitable.

-- Other coalitions, including the current frontrunner "The Coalition of Forces for Democratic Change," also appear to be struggling to stay together.

End Summary and Comments.

¶1. (U) On August 31, the AJD (Alliance for Justice and Democracy) announced that it had split from the BPC (Bloc For Change) political party coalition. The BPC was Mauritania's first political party coalition, and the only coalition with a clearly defined platform, namely, supporting the rights of Afro-Mauritanians. While the three remaining parties in the BPC have vowed to continue working together in the run-up to elections, AJD was by far the largest and most powerful party in the coalition, and their departure greatly weakens BPC's electoral prospects.

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INFIGHTING AND EGOS IN MAURITANIA'S ONLY "REAL" COALITION  
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¶12. (C) AJD President Cheikh Amadou Cisse told PolOff September 12 that "the coalition struggled from the beginning," adding that "each party wanted to control the direction of the coalition, and many members had their own personal ambitions." "When the BPC formed, we were the only real coalition, with a plan to fight for the rights of all Afro-Mauritanians...but after a while, the coalition focused more on gaining power, and less on our support for Afro-Mauritanian issues," Cisse said.

¶13. (C) Cisse explained that he finally decided to withdraw AJD from the coalition following the decision by the other coalition members to accept the membership of a fifth political party (the unrecognized Party for Mauritanian Development) headed by Abdelkoudous Ould Abeidna, a wealthy businessman and cousin of former President Taya. "Taya was the worst enemy of Afro-Mauritanians, and the membership of Abeidna's party would be a betrayal of all of AJD's members," Cisse said, adding that "the other coalition members clearly didn't care about our cause, only our chances for political success."

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AJD'S NEW ELECTORAL PLAN  
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¶14. (C) Cisse said AJD will not look to form or join another coalition before the municipal and legislative elections in November, but will instead run its own party candidates in

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those races. "We don't have enough time to correctly partner with other parties," he said, adding that "after the elections we will assess how each party and coalition performed, and then make our decision as we move towards March's presidential elections."

¶15. (C) AJD intends to submit municipal and legislative candidate lists in Guidimakha, Trarza, Nouadhibou, Zouerate, Gorgol, Brakna, and Nouakchott.

¶16. (C) Cisse said that he has no plans to run for the presidency, and will instead seek one of Mauritania's 14 newly added National Deputy Seats in the National Assembly. "Mauritania is not yet ready for an Afro-Mauritanian president, so I am not planning to run in March," he said.

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CISSE'S PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES  
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¶17. (C) Cisse refused to offer any names of presidential candidates he thought had the greatest chance of winning. However, he did say that "Mauritania's presidents have always had a close connection to the military, and this election will be no different." "The next president will not be anyone the military is opposed to," he said. In response to PolOff's question if the military council would intervene in the race, Cisse said he believed the council "would remain neutral in public...but would privately not allow anyone that threatened them to rise up."

¶18. (C) Cisse said "the current coalitions and all but a few of the current political parties are essentially irrelevant." "The race for the presidency will be decided by those with power...whether they are members of a political party, a coalition, or are simply independent Mauritanian citizens." Koutsis